

Empty Homes Newsletter

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Special points of interest:

- Empty Homes high on the public's agenda
- Funding for further Empty Homes Action Zones
- Empty Homes and Council Tax joint working
- Tax Office transformed
- Changes to planning permission

Welcome from the Empty Homes Team

Welcome to the second edition of the Empty Homes Newsletter.

This issue starts with the good news that the team has met, and in fact exceeded, the Empty Homes targets for the year 2014–2015 (See page 2 for details).

The Newsletter also includes updates on the progress with Empty Homes Action Zones and other work being undertaken by the team, including grants.

Over the past few months we have been involved in a Task & Finish group, alongside elected members, with the aim of highlighting the importance of Empty Homes work and ensuring the Empty Homes Strategy is successfully implemented. We will be reporting on the out-



come of the Task & Finish Group in the next edition

We continue to work with owners to assist them in returning their properties to use and have been successful in seeing some extremely long term cases progressed and returned to occupation.

Additionally a good number of applications have been received for Empty Property Incentive Grants within our Empty Homes Action Zones.

We hope you find this issue useful and interesting, and that it provides an insight into the impact Empty Homes work is having in Shropshire.

Research Reveals Public Preference for Utilising Empty Property to Meet Housing Need

With over a million households across the Country on waiting lists for social housing, it is essential to look at options to help tackle the housing crisis and provide more good quality affordable housing.

Research commissioned by Callcredit Information Group in April 2015 canvassed opinion on what the UK public feels the main housing issues currently are, and how they think they should be addressed to reduce the number of households on housing waiting lists.

The results revealed that 58% of participants prioritised the regeneration and return to use of empty and/or dilapidated properties to

meet housing need in their area.



A further 26% gave demolition of empty properties to be replaced with new build as their preferred option

One of the top three priorities identified through the research was that neglectful owners of empty homes should be forced to rent or sell their property to assist

with addressing the UK's housing shortage.

The research also highlighted the importance of Local Authorities taking action to understand how long term empty properties should be targeted and how they could be brought back into use for occupation.

The Empty Homes Team support this public desire to re-use empty property for much needed affordable homes, and this is strongly reflected in the aims and objectives of our current strategy.

Research commissioned by Callcredit Information Group and carried out by YouGov Plc. A further summary of the research can be found at www.callcredit.co.uk/pressoffice/news/2015/04

Grant Funding Secured for a Further Three Empty Homes Action Zones

Following the success of the first Empty Property Incentive Grants and Empty Homes Action Zones, a bid was made for further funding for the next three years to extend the grants to other areas within Shropshire.

This bid was for a total of £750,000 of New Homes Bonus, which the Council receives from Central Government for increasing the provision of housing and affordable housing within their area.

As Empty Homes work significantly contributes to the amount of New Homes Bonus received by the Council, it is essential that some of this funding is utilised to support and progress Empty Homes work.

We are therefore very pleased to announce that our bid was successful and £750,000 has been allocated to Empty Homes to be split over the next three years, at £250,000 per year.



The funding is expected to be spent in three separate Action Zones providing grant assistance to return empty properties to use, creating affordable homes from disused spaces.

Targets Update

The Empty Homes Team's return to use and creation of new homes targets for the year 2014 – 2015 were:

Empty Homes returned to use - **75**
Homes created from empty property - **10**

The Team well exceeded these targets seeing **85** properties returned to use and **12** units of accommodation created from empty property in the year.

The figures for each quarter of 2014–2015 can be seen below.

	Q1 (Apr/May/ Jun)	Q2 (Jul/Aug/ Sep)	Q3 (Oct/Nov/ Dec)	Q4 (Jan/Feb/ Mar)
Empty Homes Returned to Use	19	11	23	32
Homes Created	3	3	6	0

Empty Homes and Council Tax Teamwork to Recover Empty Homes Debts

The Empty Homes Team are working with Council Tax to recover debts accrued through unpaid Council Tax on empty property.

A number of cases are in the process of being referred to Shropshire Council's Legal Services to apply for Charging Orders on the properties.

Charging Orders could ultimately result in Enforced Sales to recoup



debts to the Council and return properties to occupation as homes.

We are also working to identify properties incorrectly registered for Council Tax purposes to ensure the correct charge is being applied. The Empty Homes Council Tax Premium

of 150% applies to property which has been empty for 2 years or more in order to encourage owners to take action to return their properties to use.

There are several cases which demonstrate the success of this approach, for example one property which was empty for 10 years now occupied and being maintained to avoid the extra costs of keeping it empty.

"Empty Homes Team exceed annual targets"

Empty Homes Action Zones Update

Action Zones focus Empty Homes and regeneration work in Shropshire, targeting Empty Homes Incentive Grant funding in areas it is most needed.

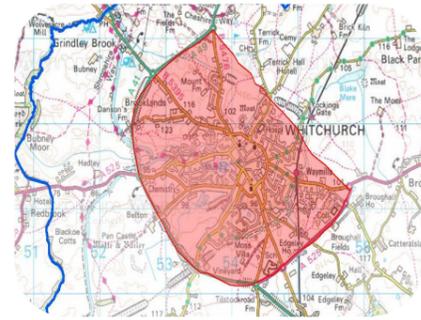
Work in the first EHAZ, Market Drayton, is drawing to a close with the budget now spent and the final grant currently on site. This will result in the return to use of three flats and creation one further unit of affordable housing in a long term empty building.

The Oswestry EHAZ is still ongoing with one unit returned to use

and four units created so far. Work is progressing well in the town with a number of grant applications currently in negotiations.

Whitchurch is the Empty Homes Action Zone for 2015/16 and the preparatory work which has been ongoing for some time has enabled a quick start with the first grant being approved and works commencing within the first month of the EHAZ launching.

Empty Property Incentive Grants have integrated with existing regeneration and revitalisation programmes ad-



ministered by the Town Councils and local communities, and have incentivised a great deal of work to return empty properties to use which is on-going.

Work is currently underway to identify the next EHAZs and more information on Empty Homes Action Zones can be found in the Empty Homes Strategy 2014-2017.

“Whitchurch is the current Empty Homes Action Zone ”

Oswestry Tax Office Transformation

The old Inland Revenue building (known as Plas Ffynnon) on Middleton Road in Oswestry had stood empty since it's closure in 2010, and the property had become quite unsightly.

The site was purchased by a local developer with the intention of creating much needed affordable housing in the town.



The owner worked with the Empty Homes Team, and Shropshire Council's Housing Enabling Team, to return the building to use as 15 spacious affordable residential units.

As the property is located in an Empty Homes Action Zone, the owner was able to secure funding through the Empty Property Incentive Grant scheme as a contribution to the works required to create three of the 15 units. Additional financial

assistance was provided for the project through the Housing Enabling Team's affordable housing grants.

Extensive works were carried out to the building to create the units, however great care was also taken to sympathetically restore the building, which is well known in the town.

All of the accommodation was completed to a very high standard, whilst retaining the original characteristics of the building, and the finished units were

all let within a matter of weeks following completion of the project.

In addition to the greatly needed affordable housing, the renovated property is a vast improvement to the local street scene.

“Just to say thank you so much. There are a lot of very happy people living in Plas Ffynnon and you really helped the process happen.”

(Owner)



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Do You Own an Empty Property?

If you own an empty property in Shropshire and want to explore the options to return it to use, our Officers are available to offer support, advice and guidance. Whatever the reason your property is empty, we can provide up to date information to help you consider all the options open to you.

contacted by people looking to purchase properties in the area, and may be able to put owners in contact with prospective purchasers. Many of these individuals are looking to take on properties in need of varying degrees of work to ultimately live in as their home.

how to make the best use of your property.



If you would be interested in selling your empty property, the Team are often

So don't put it off! There are lots of options for empty properties and we're here to help you decide

Useful information... Planning Permission Changes

In May 2013 changes to the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order were made to make it easier to provide homes in existing buildings.

over shops and other retail premises on high streets.

changes will enable valuable town centre regeneration by simplifying the process for bringing disused space back into use, facilitating the provision of much needed housing.



These changes allow change of use for offices into residential accommodation through permitted development instead of a full planning application.

Permitted development rights have also been extended for converting flats

From October 2012, permitted development rights also allowed the creation of up to two residential flats above shops and other similar premises. These

As with all development, it is advised that any plans are discussed with the relevant Team to find out what permissions may be required. See the Useful Contacts section below for details of the Planning, Building Control and Historic Environment Team.

Useful contacts...



- Planning** — 0345 678 9004
planning.comments@shropshire.gov.uk
- Historic Environment** — 0345 678 9004
Historic.environment@shropshire.gov.uk
- Building Control** — 0345 678 9004
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- Council Tax** — 0345 678 9002
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